

April 4, 2009

Milwaukee Common Council's Public Works Committee

Dear Councilmen/Aldermen,

After seeing the story on the news regarding the "flip art" sign projects and subsequently reading more details in Thursday's Journal Sentinel, I am compelled to <sup>express</sup> my appreciation of your decision to put the project on hold.

I know the Council is receiving negative feedback as to your opinions on the artwork, but there is a greater picture here. I wanted to share with you the letter I have sent to the Secretary of the Department of Transportation. Enclosed, please find the letter.

As a resident of Milwaukee, I am always interested in ways to improve the city and how the city is perceived nationally, as well as international perception. There are definitely things that can be done to improve aesthetics, but at what cost. I love Milwaukee – the people are what really make it a wonderful city. Milwaukee has everything one could want in a city – sports, theatre, art, museums, culture, history, etc. A person can enjoy all these things accompanied by friendly, courteous people. There is no pretentiousness in Milwaukee like one might find in some other larger cities whose names I will leave out.

In my letter, I have briefly suggested alternatives to funding improvement projects. Perhaps investigating such options may prove worth while. This I will leave for your consideration.

Thank you for standing up for the city and its taxpayers. I look forward to learning more regarding the outcome of the current project proposal and future city improvement projects.

Sincerely,



Shannon Krueger-Karashinski

City of Milwaukee Resident

Enclosure: Letter to Secretary of the US Department of Transportation

April 3, 2009

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Secretary Ray LaHood

Dear Secretary LaHood,

I am a Milwaukee resident and have been reading about the public art project slated for Milwaukee's Wisconsin Avenue. As I understand it, the city of Milwaukee is expected to share the costs of the project with the US Department of Transportation. Milwaukee is to fund 20% and the DOT, 80%. Having lost my full time job in January, along with 60,000+ other Wisconsin residents, I am feeling first hand the hardships of the financial recession. I am very discouraged to learn a \$300,000 'art project' was approved by the Department. I am extremely supportive of Milwaukee's City Alderman who agreed to put the project on hold, and request the Department reconsider funds allocation as well.

I question why the department would allocate funds to an art project, rather than a means to promote long term stimulus? As a taxpaying citizen, it makes no sense to me that funds are so frivolously allocated, especially during the greatest recession since World War II. It seems to me, \$300,000 could be far better spent supporting projects that have potential of creating long-term jobs. Could this \$300,000 be better allocated? . What about Milwaukee's and Wisconsin's Public Transportation Systems? Does the \$300,000 have to be spent at this time at all? I can't help but wonder how many other unnecessary projects around the country are being funded?

I might be more optimistic about the funding if the project was geared to draw visitors from around the world bringing revenue to the city, like Milwaukee's Art Museum. However, from what I have seen of the proposal, this project does nothing of the sort. It merely adds interest to existing light posts and may capture the attention of some passers by. And I say, "may" because when I have walked along Wisconsin Avenue, it has typically been to get somewhere, and my focus is not looking at the light posts along the way. If I walked by these "flip art" signs, I probably would not even notice they are there. There is nothing about them that jumps out and says "hey, look at me!"

I am in agreement with Vice Chairman Alderman Joe Dudzick that the proposed art project is indicative of a "stuck in the past" mentality. There are many ways to represent the history of Milwaukee in modern fashion. One example is the Ambassador Hotel. The current owner restored the hotel beautifully capturing the history while embracing modern attraction. Milwaukee, like many other industrial cities, though having all the modern amenities of the larger cities, struggles to be represented as modern and fresh. Most Wisconsin natives know the old joke about once you cross over the Wisconsin border, you should turn your clock back 10 years. If we want to enhance the city, we should be focused in doing so in way that promotes the city as an inviting place to see and visit. Once we draw the visitors here, they will learn the people are charming in their daily interactions.

As a person who supports the arts, I appreciate Janet Zweig's enthusiasm and appreciation of the city of Milwaukee. However, if we are looking to enhance our city, why not seek alternative options? Why not promote local artists to compete to have their work displayed? There are a number of local artists who I am sure would love an opportunity to display their work and their pride in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. I would venture to guess in today's climate, there are a number of them who would do so for the recognition and publicity versus a monetary payment as well. Why not open up the challenge to local artists and involve the city (the public) in the approval process before allocating funds? Milwaukee and Wisconsin as a whole are filled with brilliant creative individuals whose artistic talents should be promoted.

As for the Department of Transportation, my main concern lies with funds allocation in relationship to our country's deficit and current economic crisis. Why are funds being allocated to "art projects" when there are opportunities to support projects that may promote long-term economic stimulus?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Shannon Krueger-Karashinski

City of Milwaukee Resident